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ABSTRACT

As part of a symposium on the performance of black students in higher education, viewed from the perspective of the theoretical learning model proposed and recently elaborated by Benjamin Bloom, this document discusses the instructional process in Educational Opportunity Programs in terms of functional components. These programs, operated at most institutions throughout the country, are special service programs to assist "disadvantaged" students in adjustment and succeeding at the institutions. Reported are the achievements of students from fifteen educational opportunity programs across the nation. (Author)

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Educational Opportunity Students: Their Learning Environments and Achievements

Presented at the American Education Research Association Annual Meeting in San Francisco, California, April 22, 1976, in Symposium on: Black Students and Higher Education: World Enough and Time, Session No. 23.14

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LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Students typically referred to as "Educational Opportunity" students are generally considered "differently advantaged," in terms of their prerequisite learnings or entry behaviors (Glaser, 1970), when compared to the majority of the students in large, private or state-supported, doctoral granting universities. The Educational Opportunity Programs that exist in these types of institutions constitute a mastery learning strategy (Bloom, 1968) for many Black, other minority, and low-income students. The concept of the EOP is based primarily on the notion that a student can master the task of completing a college curriculum if given enough time and support.

From a systems analysis perspective, the learning environment in higher education is a complex educational system with a variety of environmental factors entering the system. A variety of processes are conducted in the institutions to produce outputs in the form of educated students (Baldridge, 1971). The entry behaviors of students input into the system are defined by the definitions of the institutions. Characteristics of higher education institutions are a function of their input components, the processes that are conducted in the institutions, and the outputs of the institutions.

Institutional missions determine the internal processes that occur within the institutional domains. The domains include the kinds of students the institutions try to serve, the distinctive curricula they develop, and the kinds of services they render to the community (Baldridge, 1971). Historically, the prior learning

experiences or entry behaviors of Black, other minority, and low-income students have not been within the domains of many higher education institutions. Reorganization of institutional domains is necessary for higher education institutions to provide an educational opportunity to educationally different advantaged students.

Systematic input and process methods to admit, finance, and provide academic assistance to large groups of academically different advantaged students in predominately White institutions, often called Educational Opportunity Programs, constitute institutional approaches to compensate for the lack of consideration given by the institutions to the entry behaviors of differently advantaged students. Educational Opportunity Programs are based on a deficit model of education. The deficit model operates on the presumption that the institutional processes and definitions of outputs or achievements need no modification. Instead, students with different input characteristics are enrolled, and the processes are supplemented for the students through compensatory programs (Gordon and Wilkerson, 1966). Students with different input characteristics are required to offset their educational and economic deficiencies through the use of compensatory practices, and to meet the traditional output criteria of achievement for completion of the educational processes in the institutions.

The processes within the institutions are based on criteria for selection that exclude many Black and other minority students. There is a lack of flexibility in the institutional processes for adequately considering the prior learning experiences that the Black, other minority, and low-income students bring to the

learning environment. Little consideration of the learning environmental differences of minority students is given in the institutional processes. The onus of educational redress for Black, other minority, and low-income students in higher education is upon the students.

Functional components of EOPs are based on the acceptance of the deficit model of higher education. There are five assumptions that must be made to accept the functional components of EOPs:

1. There are students who, due to insufficient educational backgrounds, have academic disadvantages in higher education institutions that historically have enrolled fewer of these students.
2. These students have the learning potential to matriculate in the institutions where the differently advantaged have not matriculated in significant numbers.
3. Traditional academic programs, standards, curricula, and teaching methods have changed very little with educationally different advantaged students in matriculation.
4. These students can succeed in traditional academic programs, meet traditional academic standards in regular curricula and under the same teaching methods as traditionally matriculating students.
5. Adequate academic, financial, and personal support can be provided to help these students succeed.

Through the establishment of EOPs, institutions seek to ameliorate the impending academic difficulties of students with different input characteristics by supplementing the internal

processes of the institutions. The desired outcomes are not modified. Special efforts are necessary to produce the desired outputs from other than traditionally defined inputs. Hence, institutions provide support in the form of services rather than through innovations in the traditional academic programs, standards, curricula, teaching methods, or testing and evaluative procedures.

The EOPs provide supplemental processes in the educational system to assist students in by-passing built-in rejection mechanisms which are used to check the input characteristics of enrolled students and to assure that the output standards of the institutions are not compromised (Jones, 1975). The by-pass system must provide adequate support for removing or minimizing the learning impediments that students might encounter. The system must also be strong enough to provide students a reasonable chance to produce in and complete the institutional processes. The reasonable chance is predicated on acceptance of the assumption that EOP students will produce in the educational system as the impediments from their previous educational environments are being removed. Provided within the reasonable chance is the presumption that students will produce on an academic level commensurate with the traditional output standards of the institutions.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

The population from which the sample for this study was chosen consisted primarily of large public and private doctoral

granting institutions in the midwest (Jones, 1975). Educational Opportunity Programs in fifteen institutions were surveyed to determine the freshman year and senior year academic profiles, academic persistence patterns, and undergraduate grade point averages of students participating in these programs. The fifteen institutions enrolled about 7,000 students in the EOPs. The numbers of students in each program ranged from 131 to 1,050 with a median of 475 students per EOP.

The input factors used to determine the academic profiles of entering EOP students were admissions test scores, high school grade point averages, and ranks in high school graduating classes. The entering EOP classes of 1969 were used to establish input and output information from the responding institutions. Approximately 1,100 students entered these institutions through EOPs in 1969. The range was from 47 students in the smallest class to 270 students in the largest entering EOP class with a median of 75.

The median of the mean ACT scores reported for students in EOPs in the responding institutions that required ACT's was 14 and the median of the combined mean SAT's was 663. The range of the median ACT scores was 13 to 17 and the mean SAT range was 605 to 796.

The median of the mean high school GPA's (Grade Point Averages) for students in all programs surveyed was 2.5, and the range of high school mean GPA's for students entering the various institutions was 1.8 to 3.2. The mean high school rank in class for each program ranged from the 40th percentile to the 75th percentile, and the median of the mean high school ranks in class was the 66th percentile.

The input characteristics of entering EOP students in the responding institutions in this survey revealed a profile of academic achievement in secondary school learning experiences. However, the EOP students were academically disadvantaged when admissions scores were used as an academic input characteristic. The EOP mean admissions scores were from one to one and a half standard deviations below the mean of the entering freshmen classes of the institutions surveyed. This dichotomy illustrates the differences in the essential entry behaviors that minority and majority students bring to the learning task.

Admissions, academic advising, tutoring, financial aid, and supportive counseling generally constitute functional components of EOPs. The learning tasks in the institutions are altered through the functional components of EOPs so that each alteration requires different entry behaviors (Bloom, 1971). The special services provided by these programs emphasize the strengths of the students usually through supplemental learning experiences to the instructional processes. The students are generally allowed to take reduced academic loads if they feel the need to and to extend their academic tenure beyond four years with financial support if the need arises. Reasonable progress in good academic standing is the usual requirement for continued financial support in the programs.

In this study the measures of achievement used to describe the output characteristics of EOP students were the percentage of 1969 EOP freshmen in the 1973 graduating EOP classes, their college GPAs, and the average EOP student academic tenure. There were 400 students in all the graduating classes of the responding programs.

The range was from 10 in one program to 65 in two others with a median of 41 graduating EOP students from the responding institutions. The percentage of 1969 entering freshmen EOP students in the 1973 graduating classes ranged from 4 percent to 80 percent. The median percentage of the 1969 freshmen in the 1973 class was 22 percent. The median of the mean college GPA for EOP students in the 1973 class was 2.5 with a range of 2.5 to 2.7. The academic tenure of EOP students ranged from 4.3 years to 5.5 years. The median academic tenure for EOP students in the responding institutions was 4.5 years.

Educational Opportunity students accomplish the established achievement output criteria. They enter the institutions with high school academic averages and ranks in class comparable to other students. They persist in the institutions, and they graduate with academic averages as strong as their high school averages were when they entered the institutions. However, the students generally take more than four years to complete their degrees.

In conclusion, I suggest that Educational Opportunity Programs can succeed as mastery learning strategies and institutional change agents if students are given "world enough and time (Lane, 1974)."

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